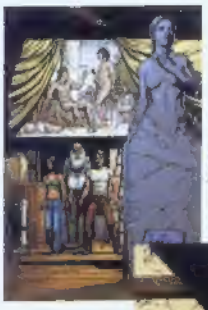
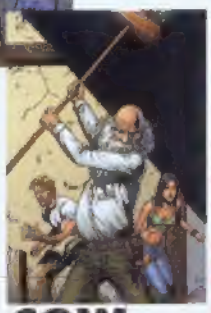
WIZARD
NO. 1/2
JOE'S COMICS
TOP COW PRODUCTIONS, INC.
J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI'S
MIDNIGHT NATION
OBI
WIZARD EXCLUSIVE EDITION
The Further Adventures of David Copperfield
Charles Dickens





midnight nation
created by j. michael straczynski

"PRECIOUS OBJECTS."

cover
gary frank
jason gorder
matt milla

writer
j. michael straczynski

penciler
gary frank

inker
jason gorder
jonathan sibal

colorist
avalon studios'
matt milla

letterers
dreamer design's
robin spehar & dennis heisler

editor
renae geerlings

editor in chief
david wohl

editorial assistant
jason ross

ink assists
jay liesten

design
rafael duffie

production
nicholas chun
alvin coats
beth sotelo

FOR TOP COW

MARC SILVESTRI chief executive officer
DAVID WOHL president of creative affairs/editor in chief
MATT HAWKINS president of publishing
PETER STEIGERWALD vice president of publishing and design/art dictator
RENAE GEERLINGS managing editor
FRANK MASTROMAURO director of sales and marketing
VINCE HERNANDEZ direct sales manager
NICHOLAS CHUN production manager
ALVIN COATS special drinks mixer

FOR WIZARD

GAREB S. SHAMUS chairman/CEO
FRED PIERCE president/COO
PATRICK McCALLUM vice president/ editor in chief
MARIA CAPELLO promotions manager
DARREN SANCHEZ production director
STEVE BLACKWELL creative director

Address Correspondence to:
Midnight Nation c/o Top Cow Productions Inc.
10390 Santa Monica Blvd. No. 110, Los Angeles, Ca. 90025
E-Mail: midnightnation@topcow.com

for Midnight Nation and Joe's Comics previews, message boards and more go to
www.topcow.com

www.wizardworld.com

MIDNIGHT NATION™ Vol. 1, Issue 1/2, MARCH 2001. FIRST PRINTING. Published by Top Cow Productions Inc. 10390 Santa Monica Blvd #110 Los Angeles, Ca 90025 and Gareb Shamus Enterprises, Inc. DBA Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920.
Midnight Nation™ it's logo, all related characters and their likenesses are ™ & © 2001 J. Michael Straczynski and Top Cow Productions Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. The entire contents of this book are ™ & © 2001 Top Cow Productions Inc. Any similarities to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. With the exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this book may be reprinted in any form without the express written consent of Wizard Entertainment, J. Michael Straczynski, Marc Silvestri or Top Cow Productions Inc. Wizard and the Wizard logotype are registered trademarks of Wizard Entertainment.

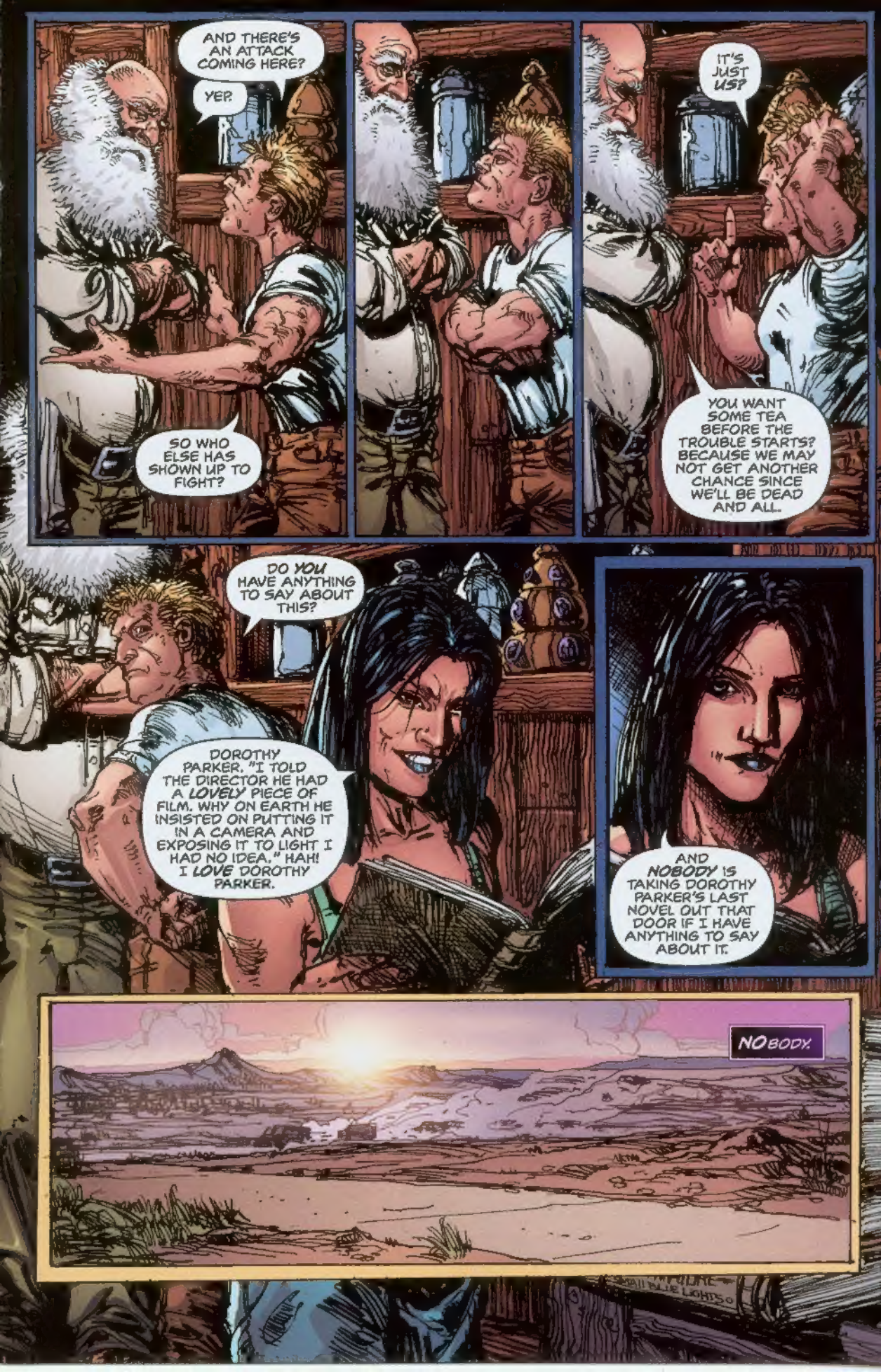
PRINTED IN CANADA

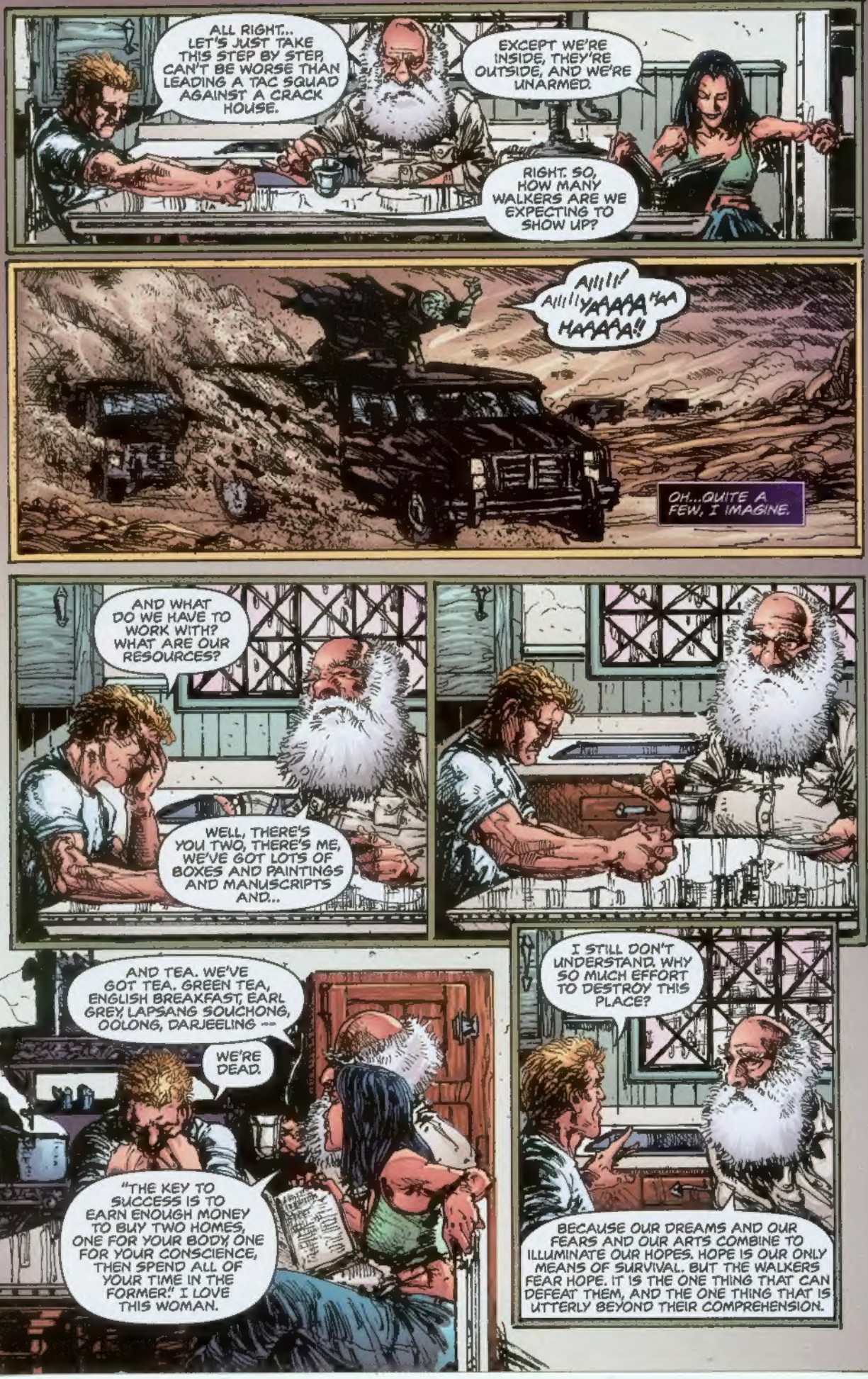
LAUREL WON'T TELL ME EXACTLY HOW MANY TIMES SHE'S TAKEN THE LONG WALK WITH SOME POOR JOKER TRYING TO RECLAIM HIS SOUL.
THAT "POOR JOKER" PART WOULD BE ME.
SHE ALSO WON'T TELL ME IF SHE'S EVER GOTTEN LOST BEFORE.
AS IN "BEFORE THIS TIME."
SO WHAT THE HELL IS THIS PLACE?
IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. BUT IT'S NEVER SUPPOSED TO BE ANY PARTICULAR "HERE." SO I GUESS *THIS* HERE IS AS GOOD AS ANY *OTHER* HERE.
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE PLACE IN-BETWEEN.
I DO. BUT SOMETIMES THE MOST SUPRISING THINGS ARE THE THINGS YOU THINK YOU ALREADY KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT.
SOMEBODY JUST SHOOT ME.

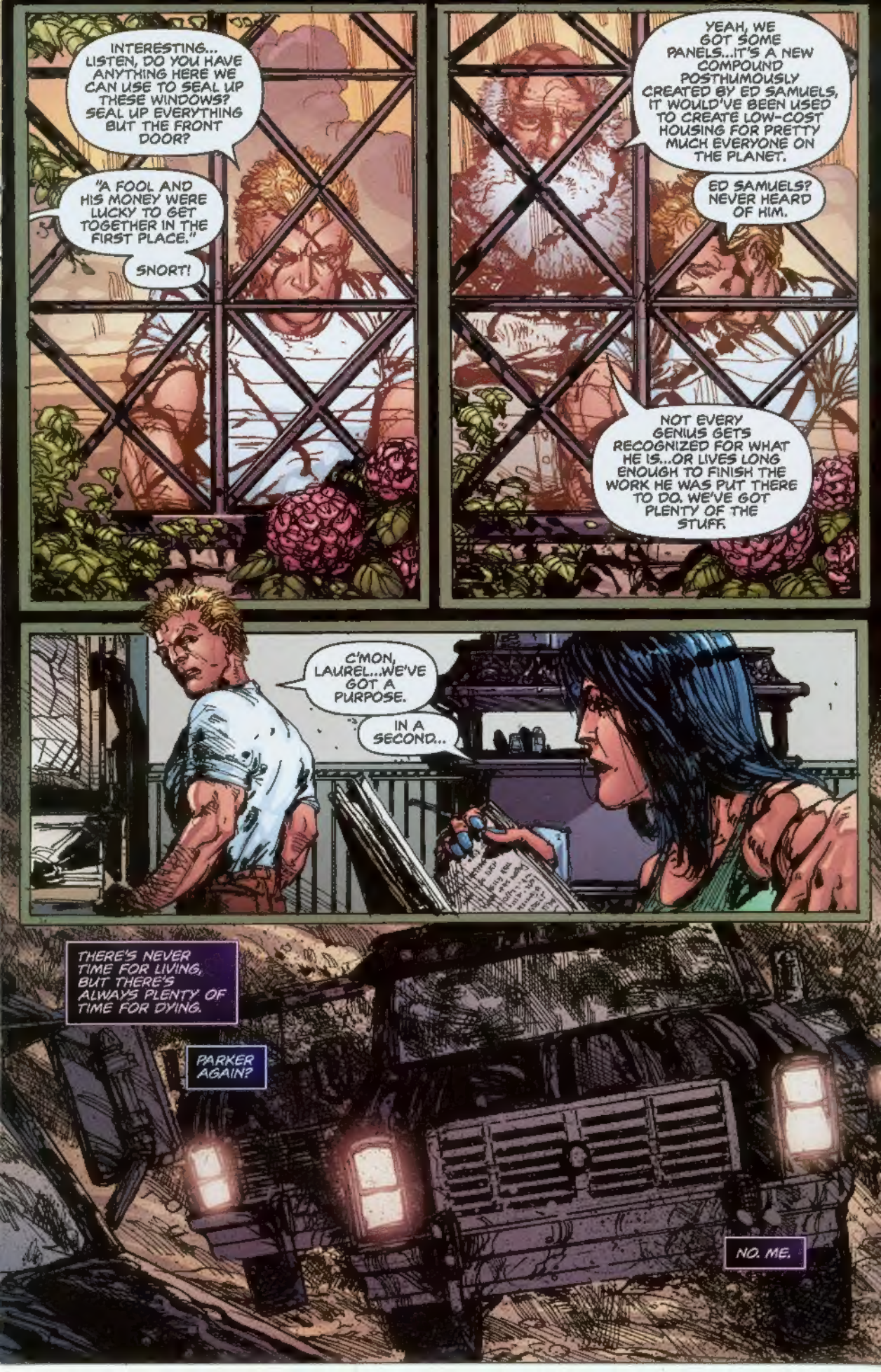
HELLO?
HELLO, IS ANYBODY HERE?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHOUT...
I CAN HEAR YA JUST FINE. IT AIN'T LIKE I'M DEAF, Y'KNOW.
SORRY, WE WERE JUST PASSING BY WHEN WE SAW YOUR BUILDING --
YEP, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE WAY IT ALWAYS STARTS.
-- AND IT WASN'T HERE A LITTLE WHILE AGO, WHEN WE LOOKED DOWN THE ROAD.
NOPE, NEVER IS. LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD, ALL WE SEE IS --
OKAY, LOOK, THAT'S ABOUT ALL THE HALF-ASSED MYSTICAL MUMBO-JUMBO I CAN HANDLE FOR THE DAY. CAN SOMEBODY JUST TELL ME, IN PLAIN ENGLISH, WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE, WHAT THIS PLACE IS, AND WHO YOU ARE?

I MEAN, WHAT IS THIS, SOME KIND OF WAREHOUSE, OR...
"EBENEEZER: BEING THE ADVENTURES OF EBENEEZER SCROOGE IN AMERICA." BY CHARLES DICKENS.
OKAY, HOLD THE BUS HERE, I KNOW DICKENS, I USED TO READ DICKENS, AND I KNOW HE NEVER WROTE ANYTHING WITH THIS TITLE.
THIS 45..."SANTA MONICA SATIN," BY THE BIG BOPPER.
HIS FOLLOW-UP TO "CHANTILLY LACE."
THAT PAINTING... IS THAT...
VAN GOGH'S "FLOWERS AND FARMERS AT REST." BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT?
"SECOND INAUGURAL SPEECH, FINAL DRAFT, WRITTEN BY..
...WRITTEN BY JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY.
YES, THAT'S A GOOD ONE. I READ IT MYSELF, FROM TIME TO TIME.
"WE COMMIT THIS GENERATION TO THE CREATION OF A NEW COVENANT, THAT WE SHOULD LOVE OUR FELLOW MAN, IN ALL HIS CREEDS AND COLORS, AND WAR NO MORE. WE SHALL OPPOSE TYRANNY IN WHATEVER FORM, WHETHER ON AMERICAN SOIL OR ANY LAND ON WHICH FREE MEN AND WOMEN LABOR UNDER THE LASH OF OPPRESSION. WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TODAY, IN THIS PLACE, TO THE PROPOSITION THAT OUR GREATEST WORK IS NOT YET DONE, THAT WE HAVE MUCH TO DO, AND FAR TO GO, AND--"
WAIT, STOP...
KENNEDY NEVER WROTE THAT. HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO WRITE A SECOND INAUGURAL SPEECH BEFORE HE WAS KILLED IN DALLAS.
THAT'S RIGHT.
SO HOW DID...I MEAN... WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

SOMEBODY ONCE SAID THAT EVERY WORK OF ART EXISTS OUTSIDE THE ARTIST, THAT THE HORSE WAS ALWAYS THERE IN THE MARBLE. THE ARTIST JUST HAD TO CHIP AWAY ENOUGH MARBLE TO REVEAL THE HORSE INSIDE. THAT THE POEM WAS ALWAYS WRITTEN, THE PAINTING ALWAYS FINISHED, THE NOVEL...
WELL, YOU GET THE IDEA.
THIS IS THE REPOSITORY FOR ALL THE GREAT UNFINISHED WORKS THAT SPOKE OF HOPE, BY THOSE CUT DOWN TOO SOON TO FINISH THE WORK THAT WAS AHEAD OF THEM.
THE LIBERTY CANTATA BY BEETHOVEN. A LATINO ROCK OPERA BY RICHIE VALENS. PENCILS FOR JACK KIRBY'S "FOREVER NEVER COMES." EINSTEIN'S UNIFIED FIELD EQUATION. "MUMBO AND THE JOLLYCAT" BY DR. SEUSS AND "THE LANDED SEA" BY EMILY DICKINSON.
SONGS. PAINTINGS. SCULPTURES. POEMS. NOVELS. STORIES. ALL THE GREAT, UNFINISHED WORKS OF HOPE.
WE'VE EVEN GOT THE REALLY FUNNY NOVEL THAT DOSTOEVSKY WAS GOING TO WRITE AS SOON AS HE STOPPED BEING SO DAMNED DEPRESSING...
I GET IT, I GET IT...BUT WHAT'S IT DOING *HERE?*
IT'S GOT TO BE *SOMEWHERE,* DOESN'T IT? MAY AS WELL BE HERE.
NO, I MEAN --
LOOK, I JUST WORK HERE, ALL RIGHT? EVERY FEW DAYS A BOX SHOWS UP WITH MORE STUFF. I CATALOGUE IT, FIND A PLACE FOR IT SO IT WON'T FALL OVER AND KILL ME, AND WAIT FOR THE NEXT BOX TO SHOW UP.
OR FOR SOMEBODY LIKE YOU TO SHOW UP.
SEE, FOR EVERY PLACE THAT KEEPS HOPE ALIVE, YOU'VE ALWAYS GOT FIVE OR SIX GUYS OUT TO DESTROY IT. WE GET TROUBLE FROM TIME TO TIME, AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS, OR WHEN IT'S *GONNA* HAPPEN, I GET SENT SOMEBODY TO HELP PROTECT THIS PLACE.
SOMETIMES I GET KNIGHTS, OR A CIVIL WAR BATTALION, OR GUNFIGHTERS, OR --


AND THERE'S AN ATTACK COMING HERE?
YEP.
SO WHO ELSE HAS SHOWN UP TO FIGHT?
IT'S JUST US?
YOU WANT SOME TEA BEFORE THE TROUBLE STARTS? BECAUSE WE MAY NOT GET ANOTHER CHANCE SINCE WE'LL BE DEAD AND ALL.
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT THIS?
DOROTHY PARKER. "I TOLD THE DIRECTOR HE HAD A LOVELY PIECE OF FILM. WHY ON EARTH HE INSISTED ON PUTTING IT IN A CAMERA AND EXPOSING IT TO LIGHT I HAD NO IDEA." HAH! I LOVE DOROTHY PARKER.
AND NOBODY IS TAKING DOROTHY PARKER'S LAST NOVEL OUT THAT DOOR IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT.
NOBODY.


ALL RIGHT... LET'S JUST TAKE THIS STEP BY STEP, CAN'T BE WORSE THAN LEADING A TAC SQUAD AGAINST A CRACK HOUSE.
EXCEPT WE'RE INSIDE, THEY'RE OUTSIDE, AND WE'RE UNARMED.
RIGHT. SO, HOW MANY WALKERS ARE WE EXPECTING TO SHOW UP?
AIIII! AIIIIYAAAAAHAA HAAAAA!!
OH...QUITE A FEW, I IMAGINE.
AND WHAT DO WE HAVE TO WORK WITH? WHAT ARE OUR RESOURCES?
WELL, THERE'S YOU TWO, THERE'S ME, WE'VE GOT LOTS OF BOXES AND PAINTINGS AND MANUSCRIPTS AND...
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY SO MUCH EFFORT TO DESTROY THIS PLACE?
BECAUSE OUR DREAMS AND OUR FEARS AND OUR ARTS COMBINE TO ILLUMINATE OUR HOPES. HOPE IS OUR ONLY MEANS OF SURVIVAL. BUT THE WALKERS FEAR HOPE. IT IS THE ONE THING THAT CAN DEFEAT THEM, AND THE ONE THING THAT IS UTTERLY BEYOND THEIR COMPREHENSION.
AND TEA. WE'VE GOT TEA. GREEN TEA, ENGLISH BREAKFAST, EARL GREY, LAPSANG SOUCHONG, OOLONG, DARJEELING --
WE'RE DEAD.
"THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS TO EARN ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY TWO HOMES, ONE FOR YOUR BODY, ONE FOR YOUR CONSCIENCE, THEN SPEND ALL OF YOUR TIME IN THE FORMER." I LOVE THIS WOMAN.


INTERESTING... LISTEN, DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING HERE WE CAN USE TO SEAL UP THESE WINDOWS? SEAL UP EVERYTHING BUT THE FRONT DOOR?
"A FOOL AND HIS MONEY WERE LUCKY TO GET TOGETHER IN THE FIRST PLACE."
SNORT!
YEAH, WE GOT SOME PANELS...IT'S A NEW COMPOUND POSTHUMOUSLY CREATED BY ED SAMUELS, IT WOULD'VE BEEN USED TO CREATE LOW-COST HOUSING FOR PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE ON THE PLANET.
ED SAMUELS? NEVER HEARD OF HIM.
NOT EVERY GENIUS GETS RECOGNIZED FOR WHAT HE IS...OR LIVES LONG ENOUGH TO FINISH THE WORK HE WAS PUT THERE TO DO. WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF THE STUFF.
C'MON, LAUREL...WE'VE GOT A PURPOSE.
IN A SECOND...
THERE'S NEVER TIME FOR LIVING, BUT THERE'S ALWAYS PLENTY OF TIME FOR DYING.
PARKER AGAIN?
NO. ME.

TO THE LEFT...UP...A LITTLE MORE... PERFECT.
IT AIN'T PRETTY...BUT IT'LL DO.
JUST IN TIME, TOO.
WE'VE GOT COMPANY.

SHAH!
ER...SHOULDN'T YOU BE CLOSING THAT DOOR? THEY'LL BE HERE IN A SECOND.
NO. SEE, I WAS THINK.NG ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID, THAT HOPE WAS SOMETHING THE WALKERS DON'T UNDERSTAND. WELL, THE ONLY WAY THEY'RE GETTING THROUGH THAT DOOR IS TO GO DOWN THAT HALL, WHICH IS ONLY BIG ENOUGH FOR ONE AT A TIME.
AND AFTER A WHILE, HOPE IS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD KEEP THEM COMING.
I'LL TAKE THE FIRST ONE, LAUREL?
I'LL SPOT YOU ON TWO.
THREE ALWAYS WAS MY LUCKY NUMBER.
...SNILRF... FRMPH?
SHAH?
SHAH.
SHAAAAAHHHHH!

IT'S COMING --
GOT IT.
YAAAAAHHHHHHH!
...URK!

I DUNNO... HOW MANY MORE... WE CAN TAKE... THEY'RE STRONGER... THAN I THOUGHT...
THEY ALWAYS... ARE...
RIGHT NOW, ALL THEY KNOW IS THAT THEY CAN'T GET IN...THAT ONE OF THEM DIES EACH TIME THEY TRY...
ALL THEY CAN DO IS HOPE WE CAN'T TAKE THEM ALL ONE AT A TIME...
BUT HOPE IS THE ONE LANGUAGE THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND.
NA-SHAH.

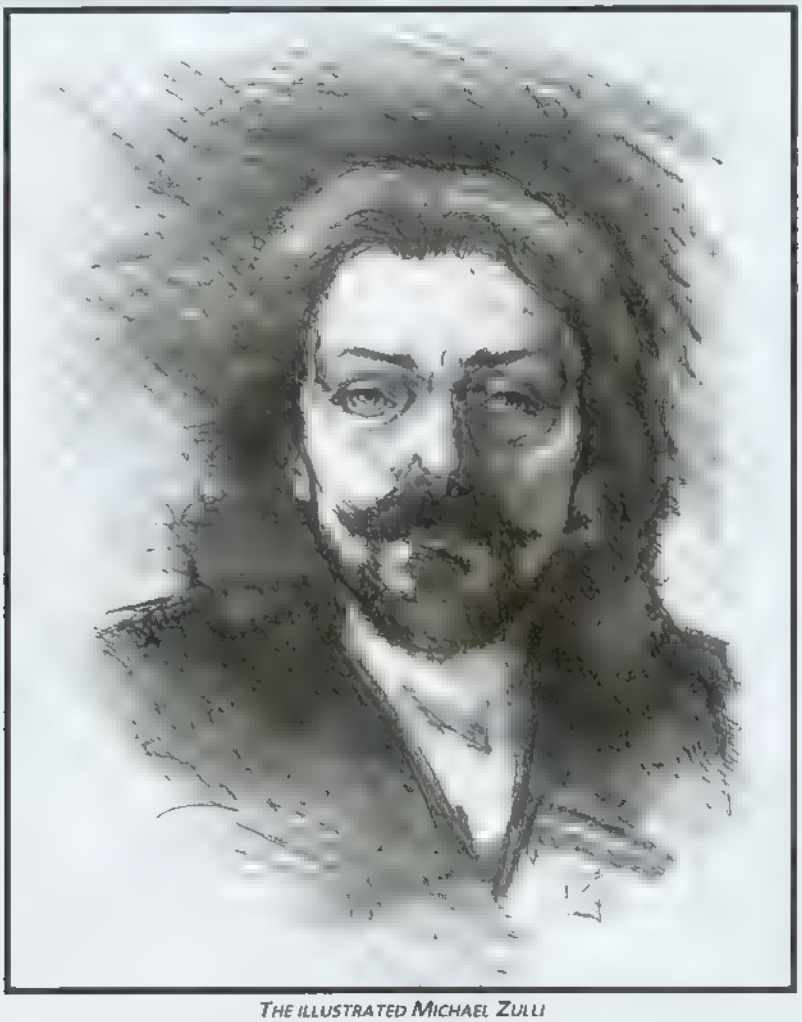
YOU KNOW, IT'S FUNNY. THE UNIVERSE ALWAYS KNOWS WHEN THIS IS GONNA HAPPEN, AND THE UNIVERSE ALWAYS SENDS ME WHAT I NEED TO PROTECT THIS PLACE.
WHO KNEW THE UNIVERSE HAD A SENSE OF HUMOR?
I FIGURED THAT ONE OUT A LONG TIME AGO. TAKE CARE, OLD MAN.
I WILL. YOU TOO.
WE WILL.
SO WHO IS ALL THIS STUFF FOR, ANYWAY?
BEAUTY HAS ITS OWN REASON FOR BEING. AND TRUTH ALWAYS COMES OUT SOMEWHERE. IF IT'S HERE, IT EXISTS, AND IF IT EXISTS, THEN SOONER OR LATER SOMEONE ELSE WILL DISCOVER IT, AND THE WORLD WILL HEAR IT, OR SEE IT, OR KNOW IT.
TRUTH IS NEVER WASTED.
HERE YOU GO, MATE. 'NOTHER BOX OF SONGS. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE THEM. I'M VERY BIG ON "A TINKER'S DAM" AND "A DISTANT PELICAN," DON'T YOU KNOW?
SIGH...ALL RIGHT, JOHN, I'LL FIND A PLACE FOR THEM.
SO WHO WERE THEY, THEN?
FRIENDS OF THE TRUTH.
YEAH, WELL, I MEAN, AREN'T WE ALL, RIGHT?
JUST GIMME SOME TRUTH NOW...
JUST GIMME SOME TRUTH NOW...
THE END.

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI'S

MIDNIGHT NATION

INTERVIEW BY RENAE GEERLINGS—EDITOR

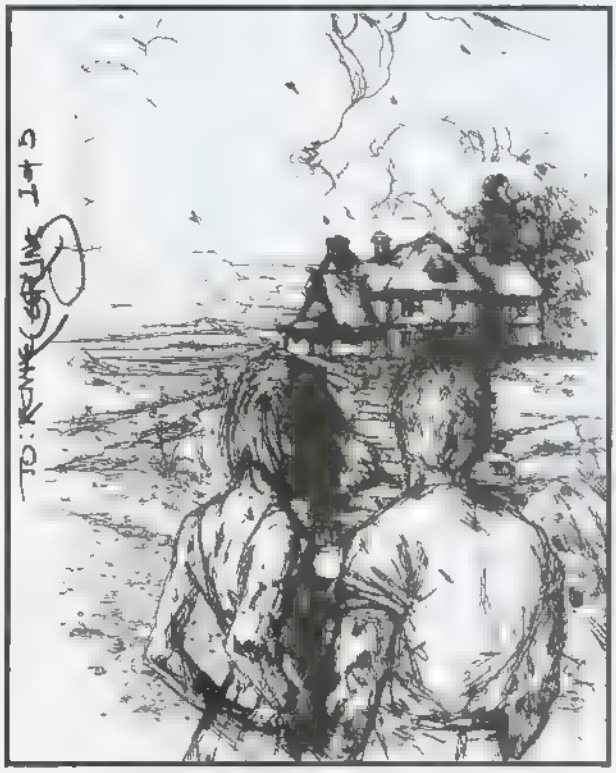
SKETCHBOOK



THE ILLUSTRATED MICHAEL ZULLI

Over the course of working with Michael Zulli on Witchblade #47 and Midnight Nation #1/2, I've had the chance to speak with him for long amounts of time on the phone. He's not your typical comic book artist (ie. early twenties, plays Nintendo, lives on McDonalds french fries). He's so poised and articulate that I've accused him of not being from this century. (Yes, I've seen Highlander far too many times.) He is also very good at making friends with his editors...the original artwork, books, and flowers he sent have succeeded in putting him high on my favorites list. So I thought I would ask him a few questions to let you, the reader, get to know Mr. Zulli a bit better as well.

BEGINING SKETCHES OF MIDNIGHT NATION 1/2'S PAGE 1



...LESS BUTT MORE COTTAGE

Michael, being a Babylon 5 fan, you were really excited to work on Midnight Nation. In all of the conversations that we've had, you've been extremely effusive about your admiration for JMS' writing. Could you expound upon that a bit for me?

I think, in the long run, what really attracted me to the stories that Joe writes, is the illusive quality of absolute easy. They seem so ordinary that at first one misses subtle way he's insinuated himself into your brain. There is great naturalness in his writing and an apparent nonchalant attitude that I'm sure is totally deceptive. A Zen sort of space if you will. That's always been a grabber to me. I love that quality in a writer, and I hope to someday express the same ease in my work.

You know, something else comes to mind: I don't know if I'm right about this, but there also seems to me to be a thread in Joe's work that has a really well founded disgust with the way popular media manipulates the mass mind. In particular he's pointing a pretty heavy finger at the "news" media. I love that. I think that's very healthy. Jaundice young minds as soon as you can, believe me, they'll thank you for it someday. Out of the skeptical mind, the ability to think for yourself is born.

And one other thing comes to mind.

He tells a great joke.

Ya gotta know when ta lighten up man.

You also particularly loved the caretaker character.

As an artist I'm fascinated with people in general. The greatest source of characters an artist can find are just walking around out side your door. Just people. All kinds. The caretaker seemed to me to be one of those people that I'd love to meet. What a job! I'd kill to follow a guy like that around for a day or two. Just think of all the stuff that he plays with, and all the things he must learn over time. Jeez, I could FINALLY figure out where I put that friggin' brush back in eighty-eight! Oh, did I mention that as a piece of character design, Gary Frank did an amazing job on him? Wish I'd done it.

Drat.

You told me a couple of days ago that you always do your work with vintage, turn of the century pens. Interesting! How did that come about?

Not much to tell actually, One day a few years back, while wandering around my

local flea market, I think some people know them as swap meets or whatever, I happened to spy a cool looking box in amidst the mash of stuff on this table. When I opened it up, inside was another box that said that inside where British steel, silver plated artist's pen nibs. The box was dated 1889. I opened it, and sure enough, inside were about twenty dusty old pen nibs that matched the brand name on the outside of the box. I thought I had died and ascended into whatever heaven is reserved for pen and ink artists! For two bucks yet! I've used them on everything that I've inked for last year or two. And, get this all you art types out there; I'm still using the same two I started with. The suckers don't die!

Good old fashioned British steel.

LAUREL

You're a painter by trade, who are your influences? Why?

Way too many to list here. But I will say, I've been profoundly influenced by Whistler, and a number of his contemporaries, as well as the great symbolist painters that followed into the turn of the century, Von Stuck, Klimt, Max Klinger, Khnopff, and on and on.

As a painter, what prompted you to go into comic books instead of a more classical approach?

Simple really. Two basic reasons, One, every artist makes art for the world outside his or her own head. As an artist, I really don't need to paint or draw anything; it's so much purer tucked away next to my hypothalamus or whatever. I bring the picture out, because of a desperate need to communicate it to others. Comics let me do that in a most satisfying way. And I get paid!

All in all, a really pleasant solution. Two: I just bleed'in love the weird, marvelous, thrilling, mysterious something that makes up a good comic. MAN.

You've been working in comics for some time, can I get some of your favorite projects that you've worked on? (this way I can also point all of your new fans to your other works)

The Wake. Period. Damn best time as a comics artist I ever had. The Midnight Nation 1/2 I just finished has something about it that rubbed me the right way too. Loved working with Paul on the Witchblade book recently. The last issue of "love street," a mini series I did with Peter Hogan a while back. Other than that, bits and pieces of everything I've done, in one way or another, has some merit somewhere in it I hope.

DAVID GREY

Ladies choice. Hah! Kidding. Anything else you think pertinent. You give me the answer, I'll come up with the question. It'll be like Jeopardy!

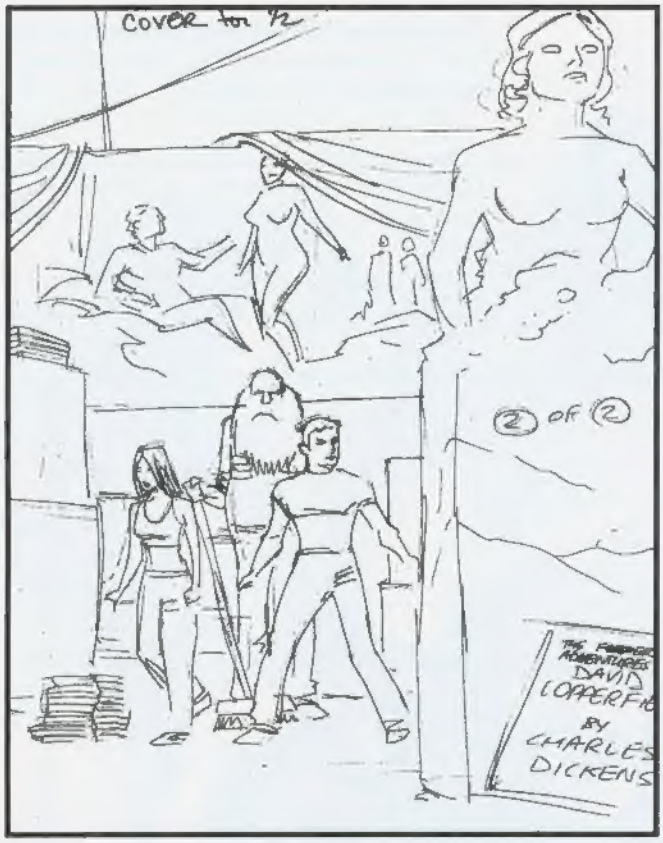
Ambient music, Indian food, anything fluffy. Heh, heh, heh. How's that?

M.

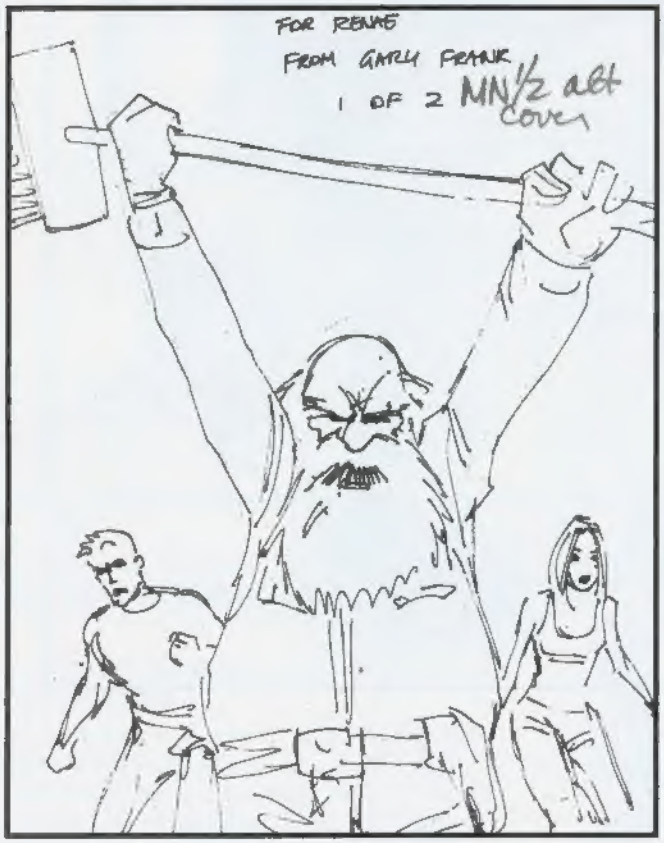
Hah! Now I have to come up with the question for that! Umm... What are you allergic to? Or what three things make up a great first date? Sheesh, I'm sure I'll think of the perfect question as soon as I send this to print...hmm...

Thanks!!

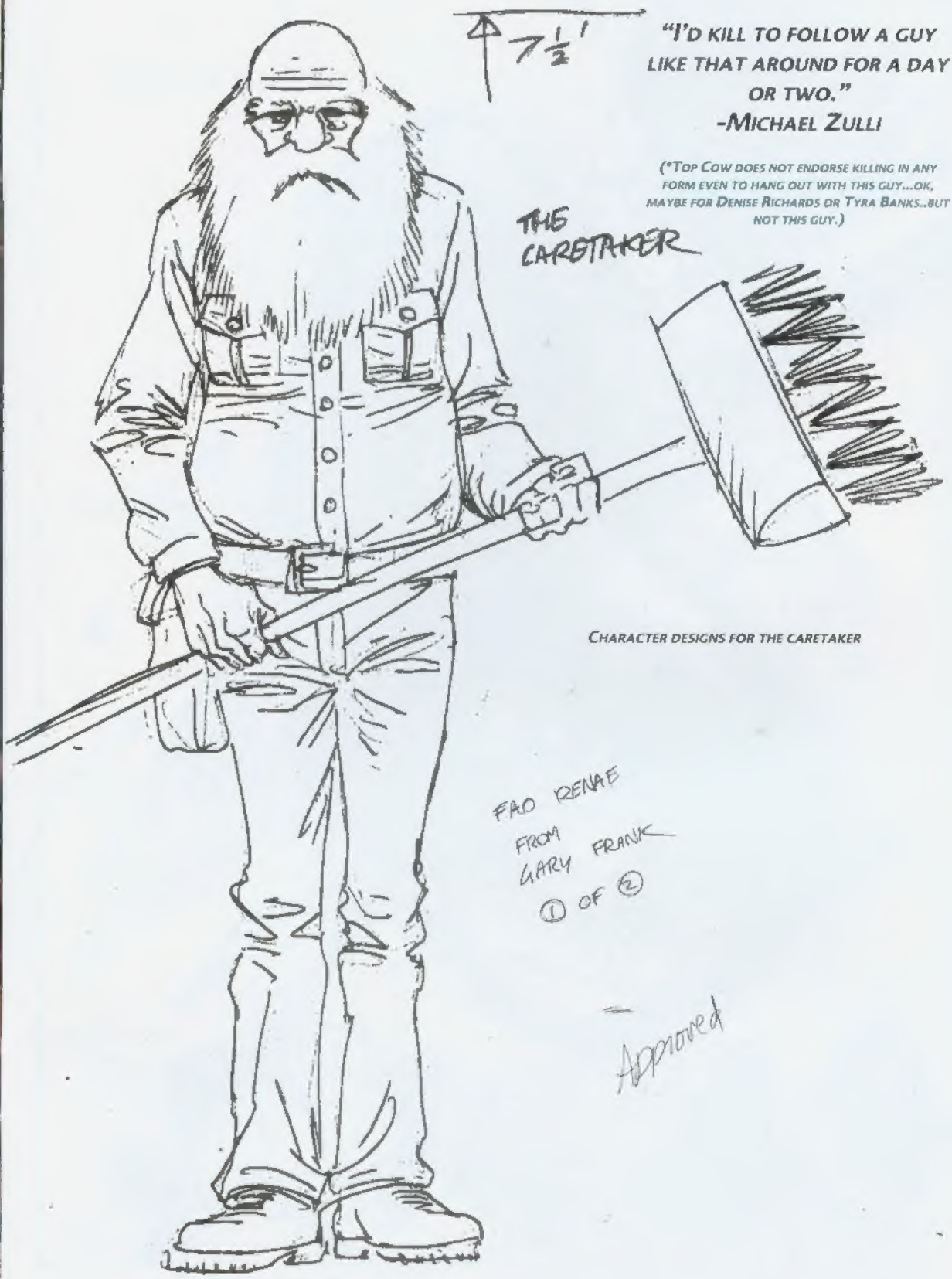
Renae!



GARY FRANK'S SKETCH FOR ONE OF THE TWO, MIDNIGHT NATION 1/2 COVERS.



GARY FRANK'S ALTERNATE COVER SKETCH. AND THE CARETAKER'S MIGHTY BROOM OF DEATH.



"I'D KILL TO FOLLOW A GUY LIKE THAT AROUND FOR A DAY OR TWO."
-MICHAEL ZULLI

(*TOP COW DOES NOT ENDORSE KILLING IN ANY FORM EVEN TO HANG OUT WITH THIS GUY...OK, MAYBE FOR DENISE RICHARDS OR TYRA BANKS..BUT NOT THIS GUY.)

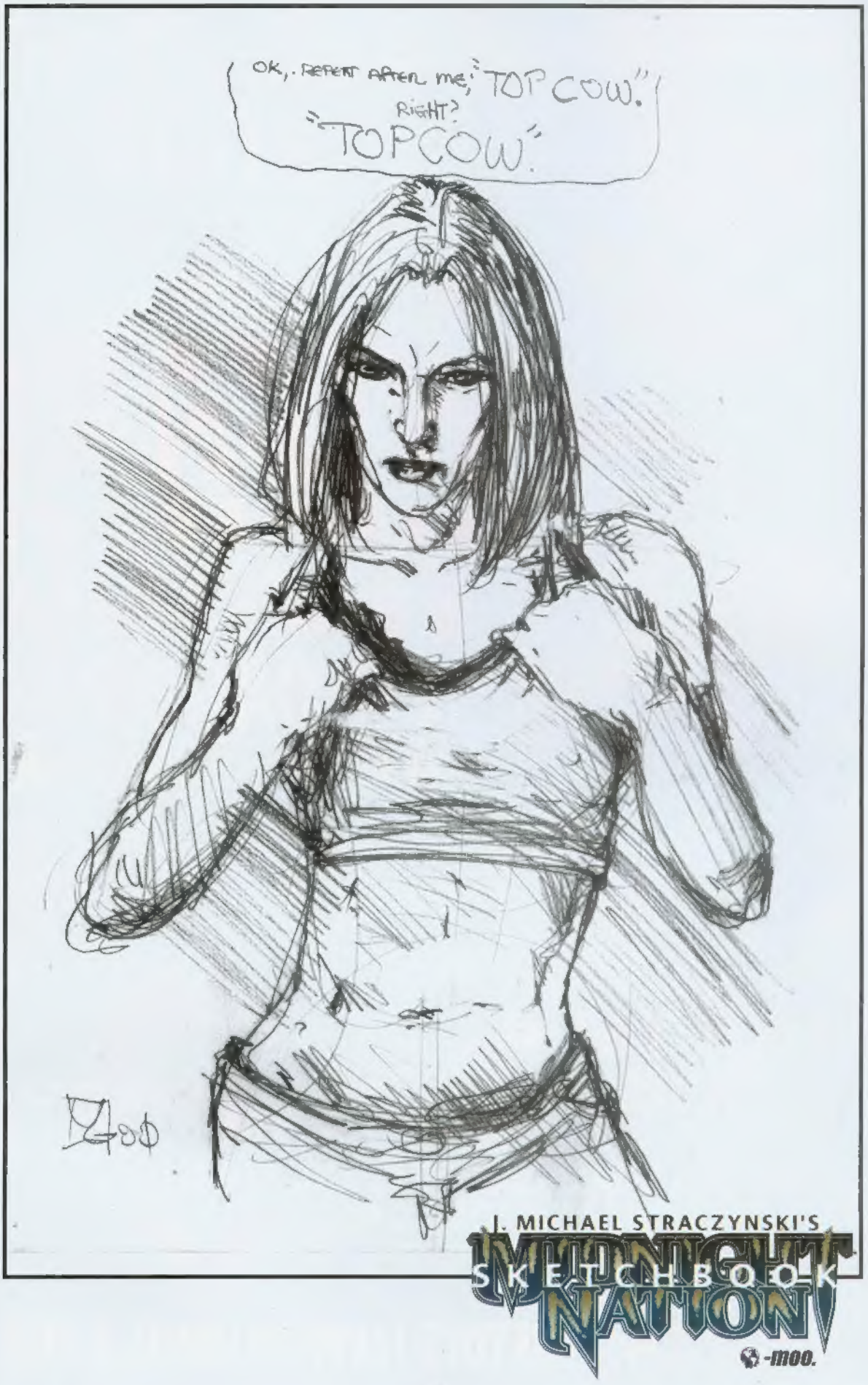
CHARACTER DESIGNS FOR THE CARETAKER

FAO RENAE
FROM
GARY FRANK
① OF ②

Approved

The MEN, we are.
YEAH!!! The MAN, I AM!
NO!!! The MAN, I AM!
NO!!! The MAN, I AM!
NO!!! The MAN, I AM!
NO!!! The MAN, I AM!
NO!!! The MAN, I AM!
UNNATURAL POSITION PIPE AND DOG?
SNUFFING LILG HANDS

CONVERSATIONS AMONGST THE MEN TEND TOWARDS MINIMALISM.


OK, REPEAT AFTER ME: "TOPCOW."
RIGHT?
"TOPCOW."
J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI'S
SKETCHBOOK
MIDNIGHT NATION
-moo.